Safe Ocean Swimming and Beach Safety at Cape Cod National Seashore

National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

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You may forget your cares during a leisurely day at the beach. But even a beautiful beach day has its dangers -- especially for the unaware. Whether "catching some rays" or plunging into the surf, the information in this brochure is designed to help you enjoy the fun and avoid the dangers.

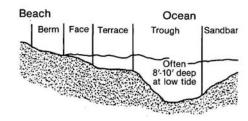
When in doubt!!

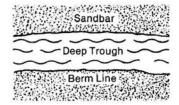
- Read regulations posted at each beach
- Look at information on beach bulletin boards
- Ask a lifeguard or ranger

SHORE TOPOGRAPHY

The beach face and terrace change. A beach face may be steep or narrow. The trough beyond the terrace to the sandbar may contain ridges and drop-offs.

Check the water depth before you dive. Severe injuries may be caused if you dive or fall from a boogie board or surf board.





Often when the depth is only waist deep on a sandbar, the water will be over your head on the way out.

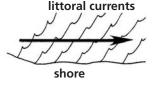
For your safety, if you walk onto an exposed sandbar that hooks left or right called a J Bar, make sure you take the same route when returning to the beach or you may be stepping into water that is over your head.

Sand abrasions, broken limbs, knee injuries, and dislocated shoulders are not uncommon. Spinal injuries with permanent paralysis may result when people are thrown to the bottom. Cape Cod National Seashore experiences these injuries every summer.

A sea-breeze that originates over the ocean and blows onshore to land is an onshore wind. Onshore winds cause waves. Because ocean winds vary, waves change from day-to-day. All waves deserve respect. Body surfing and boogie boarding are allowed on the lifeguard-protected beach---Be careful! Do not try to ride waves that are too forceful for your level of skill.



To escape the great force of waves, duck under or retreat from the breaking waves. If you are riding the wave and are thrown off, try to prevent direct head and neck contact with the ocean floor. The lifeguard- protected beach may be closed if exceptionally strong surf is present.

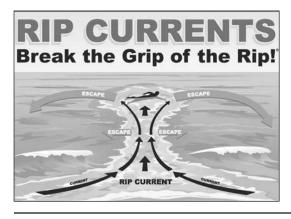


A current will move along the shore if waves come to the shore at an angle. This littoral current is present on most days and may be strong.

Visitors, especially children may be moved rapidly along the shore by the littoral current.

Many people associate "safety "with flotation aids and feel safe when going out much farther than they should. Currents or wind can move an unsuspecting person into deep water or far offshore. This is an invitation to disaster; people may be separated from a float by waves, slipping off, or deflation. For these reasons, Coast Guard approved flotation jackets are the only flotation devices allowed on Cape Cod National Seashore beaches. Remember that boogie boards that move with the waves travel at considerable speed. The weight of a person on a speeding board may cause injury if there is a collision with another person. Hard objects such as surfboards are especially hazardous. For this reason:

SURFING IS PROHIBITED ON THE LIFEGUARD-PROTECTED BEACHES FROM 9:15 AM to 5:15 PM. Red signs on the beach delineate lifeguard-protected areas.



A rip current can carry a swimmer out from shore and be be difficult to swim against. Rip currents are dangerous. Do not panic if you get caught in one. Do not tire yourself out trying to swim against it. Normally, they are not wide. Swim parallel to the shore a short distance then swim to the shore out of the current. Look for the "Break the Grip of the Rip" sign located at each beach.

Do not take risks if you do not have the skills to handle rip currents

Do not be embarrassed to call or signal for help before you tire out or get into serious trouble.

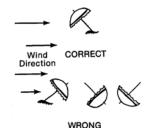
Save your strength for you own rescue. If you cannot get to shore, float on your back and control your breathing. Call for help and put one arm up for attention. Do not put both arms out of the water. This will tire you.

Do not attempt to rescue anyone else unless the situation is urgent and you are trained in ocean rescue.

When you see someone in distress, find a lifeguard or a ranger immediately.

An umbrella blown across the beach by the wind may cause an accident. When strong or gusty winds blow, umbrella tops should be set facing into the wind. Make sure a good-sized hole is dug and the umbrella is planted firmly in the sand. Pile sand around the pole to give it extra support.

Set up your umbrella away from the front of the lifeguard chairs and far enough back from the water so they don't block the lifeguard's view.



You can be killed by a lightning strike under a beach umbrella during a thunderstorm. During a storm life-guards will close the beach. Use your car for shelter.

During the rare occasion of a shark sighting, lifeguards may close the beach to all water activities. A closure may also occur if a school of bluefish are in a "feeding frenzy" in the protected beach area. Lifeguards will fly a PURPLE "dangerous marine life present" flag.

Each year a number of visitors become ill from over exposure to the sun. Watch your children. Use clothing, umbrellas, and SPF 30 sunscreen. All lotions wash off in the water. Reapply when you come out.

BEACH WARNING FLAGS

Each morning, a colored flag is flown at the head lifeguard chair. There is a sign at each beach that describes the meaning of each color.

Green: Low Hazard. Calm conditions

Yellow: Medium Hazard. Moderate surf and/or currents Red: High Hazard. High surf and/or strong currents

Red with no Water closed to the public

swim symbol:

Purple: Dangerous marine life

LOCATING YOUR EQUIPMENT. Do not settle in front of an on-duty lifeguard chair or one that is soon to be opened. This area must be kept clear for equipment. Lifeguards respond quickly to distressed or drowning swimmers; to avoid an accident, stay out of this area.

WHEN YOU HEAR A WHISTLE. Lifeguards will signal swimmers when they are in or approaching a hazardous area or because they are swimming too far out for adequate supervision.

FOR OUR DISABLED VISITORS. Beach wheelchairs are available at Coast Guard Beach in Eastham and Herring Cove Beach in Provincetown.

SAND COLLAPSE. Sand collapses easily. For your safety, climbing slopes and digging holes deeper that knee level is prohibited.

DOGS. Leashed pets are permitted at Cape Cod National Seashore ocean beaches except as follows: During the summer, pets are not permitted on life guard-protected beaches. Passing through to unprotected areas of the beach is permitted. During shorebird nesting periods, pets are not permitted in posted locations. Passing through these areas is prohibited.

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OCEAN LIFEGUARDING, ATTEND A SURF RESCUE DEMONSTRATION AT ONE OF OUR BEACHES.